

What happens when an elephant and a whale both think that they are the strongest animals on the earth? Read the folktale to find out and answer the questions that follow.

Strongest of All

LOUISIANA

by Pleasant DeSpain



- 1 One day long ago, clever Rabbit was walking along the seashore. Hearing voices, he stopped to listen. Elephant and Whale were having a conversation. He wanted to hear every word.
- 2 “Sister Whale,” said Elephant, “you are the largest, strongest, and most beautiful animal of the sea. Naturally, I’m the largest, strongest, and most beautiful animal on the land. We two should rule over all the animals, birds, and fish on the earth.”
- 3 “Yes, it’s true, Brother Elephant,” said Whale. “We are the greatest. You should rule the land. I’ll be happy to rule the sea.”
- 4 Rabbit decided to play a trick on these two behemoths.
- 5 “I’m twice as smart as both of them,” he said. “All I need is a long, strong rope and my jungle drum.”
- 6 Later that afternoon Rabbit found Elephant in the woods and said, “Hello, Powerful Ruler of All the Animals that Walk and All the Birds that Fly. I’m in need of a small favor.”
- 7 Elephant liked Rabbit’s compliment and was willing to listen.
- 8 “What can I do for you, my little friend?” he trumpeted.
- 9 “My milk-cow is stuck in the sand on the beach. I’m not big enough to pull her out. Let me tie one end of this rope around you and the other end around my cow. When you hear me beat my drum, you’ll know it’s time to pull hard, really hard.”

- 10 “It’s a good plan,” said Elephant. “You are wise to come to me as I’m the strongest friend you have.”
- 11 “Thank you, Elephant. Wait for the drum!”
- 12 So saying, Rabbit ran to the beach and found Whale sunning herself near the shore.
- 13 “Hello, Friend Whale. My, but you look sleek and powerful today,” said Rabbit.
- 14 Whale smiled and replied, “Yes, Rabbit, I’m strong today and every day. I rule all the creatures of the sea.”
- 15 “Of course,” responded Rabbit. “That’s why I’ve come to you with my small problem.”
- 16 “What can I do to help?” asked Whale.
- 17 “It’s my milk-cow. She’s mired deep in the bayou-mud way up in the woods. I can’t get her out. I’d like to tie one end of this rope around your tail and the other end around my cow. I’ll beat my drum so you’ll know when to pull.”
- 18 “Of course I’ll help,” said Whale.
- 19 She swam closer to shore so that he could tie the long rope to her massive tail.
- 20 “Pull hard when you hear my signal,” said Rabbit as he ran back into the woods.
- 21 He found his drum and pounded hard and loud. *Boom! Boom! Boom!* The sounds carried to both Elephant in the forest and Whale in the sea.
- 22 They both began to pull, each against the other, and were shocked at the resistance. Elephant tugged so hard that Whale hit the sand in the shallow water. Whale pulled back so hard that Elephant was being dragged out of the woods.
- 23 “That cow must be stuck in the sand up to her neck,” bellowed Elephant.
- 24 “That cow must be buried in the mud up to her nose,” cried Whale.
- 25 Next thing they knew the rope snapped! One end flew back and stung Elephant on the ear.
- 26 “Ouch!” he cried.
- 27 The other end smacked Whale on the tail.
- 28 “Ouch!” she cried.
- 29 Rabbit began to laugh. His laughter carried deep into the woods and far out to sea. Elephant and Whale realized that they had been tricked. They also discovered that when it came to cleverness, Rabbit was the strongest of all.